

Someone's in the Kitchen with Cortana

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Summary: "You've faced the Covenant. And the Flood. And the Prometheans. Don't tell me that you're frightened of a little domestication." Set in the Fac Fortia et Patere universe. Total Chief/Cortana fluff.

Someone's in the Kitchen with Cortana

**Written for the fantastically fantasticjackie for her birthday.
This takes place after "Haunted" and, yes, this is 100% shippy fluffness. (I know, what?)**

* * *

><p>"Cortana."

Her mind sluggishly processed that someone was calling her name over her comm channel.

How long had she been asleep? Two hours? Three?

Despite knowing that few people would contact her in the middle of the night without good reason, she couldn't get her eyes to cooperate and open.

"_Cortana?_" This time the voice -John's- was more unsure.

The last traces of sleep fled as her brain caught up with the fact that there was only one reason for him to be contracting her at this hour.

He was keeping his promise.

Though she was the one who often contacted him in the middle of the night, John had remained true to his word when sleep remained elusive to him and contacted her, no matter the hour.

She sat up, brushing the hair from her face. "I'm here."

There was a long pause. "_You were sleeping._"

She didn't bother hiding the truth from him. "I was thirty minutes from another one of my notorious nightmares," she retorted. "You really are a hero."

He didn't reply.

"How bad was it?" she asked, standing up. She knew she wasn't going to be able to go back to sleep now.

"_I couldn't fall back to sleep._" He didn't offer any more information and Cortana didn't push. Part of their unspoken agreement was neither would force the other to confess their subconscious terrors.

"Alright, meet me in the secondary kitchen in fifteen minutes. There is something I've wanted to try doing for a while."

"_I'll be there._"

Cortana crossed her room, changing out of her nighttime clothes into her standard issue uniform. After the second time she had woken John up in the middle of the night, she had decided that instead of spending the hours being haunted by the ghosts of the past, she would try something new, taking advantage of her second chance at life.

She had dragged John to the hydroponics lab to grow her own tomato plant; she had made John teach her how to swim; he had shown her how to start a fire using a mostly used battery from a plasma pistol.

She might not be able to sleep through the night like most humans, but she was determined to make the rest of her life as normal as she could.

Well, as normal as a Human-Forerunner hybrid could be.

It didn't take long for her to make her way through the ship and into the seldom used kitchen facilities. Most of the personnel on board took advantage of the mess hall's kitchen -with a cook ready to prepare a meal at any hour of the day- rather than venture down and cook something for themselves.

She rummaged through the fully stocked pantry and refrigerator, pulling out the ingredients they would need for her latest endeavor in the world of domesticity. As she set down the large mixing bowl on the counter, John entered into the room.

Whatever he dreamed about must have upset him because when he approached her, he didn't just look at her, he _devoured _her with his eyes.

What were you dreaming in there?

She refused to acknowledge the flush that was heating her cheeks.

They were here because he had an upsetting dream, she reminded herself forcefully.

She looked him up and down. It was still strange to see him walking around wearing only the black biosuit that had become synonymous with the Spartans stationed aboard the _Infinity_. Gone was the trademark green armor that had accompanied John wherever he went. It had been a transition for him and the people around him, both having to acknowledge the man behind the armor.

But, despite his uncharacteristic verbosity on the subject, Del Rio and ONI had remained resolved to their newly established regulation: Spartans that weren't involved in an active mission were to not wear their MJOLNIR armor. It was, according to them, an attempt to make the soldiers in the Spartan program "approachable".

He took a step into the kitchen area and frowned slightly.

"Tonight," Cortana started before he could make any excuses, "we bake." She thrust an apron at John. "Here. Put this on."

John's arms remained at his side. He gave her a disapproving look. "Cortana, I'm _not_ wearing that."

"When you get flour all over your suit, don't complain," she said lightly, tossing the white fabric in the corner.

"I'll take my chances," he said, stepping a step towards the counter. He eyed the ingredients suspiciously. "Baking?"

She shrugged. "How hard could it be? Besides, if the kitchen crew ever goes on strike, I want to be prepared."

John looked at Cortana. "I've never done anything like this before," he quietly admitted.

A heaviness settled over the room. Cortana knew this, of course. Part of her reason for encouraging John to join her in her random endeavors was to give him a chance to experience those things that were taken from him when he was a youth.

"How bad can a little sugar and flour be?" she asked softly.

He looked at the eggs. "I'm not worried about them."

She raised an eyebrow. "You've faced the Covenant. And the Flood. And the Prometheans." She ticked each name off with her fingers. "Don't tell me that you're frightened of a little domestication."

"I could shoot them," he said flatly.

"Here." She held on a wooden spoon. "Arm yourself with this."

John stood beside her, just a couple of inches closer to Cortana than normal. His gaze shifted between the bowl and Cortana's face.

Again, she wondered what he could have dreamt that unnerved him so much, but she silenced her question.

"Mix these," she said as she dumped the butter and sugar into the bowl, "until they're creamed together."

John did as she instructed. She watched as he stirred, noting how distracted he seemed. She wondered if he was even paying attention to what he was doing. Carefully, she slipped in between him and the counter, peering down into the bowl.

It could have been her imagination, but she swore she heard John's breath catch slightly.

She suddenly realized just how close she was to John. It could have been her sleep-deprived mind, but she could swear she could feel the heat coming from his body.

That unwelcome blush crept on her cheeks again.

Not now, Cortana.

"Here." She handed him the egg, hoping to distract herself from her body's traitorous thoughts.

He set down the spoon on the counter and reached to take the egg from her. Her pulse quickened as he leaned forward, his arm brushing against hers.

She would have stood there, flustered by his closeness, if it hadn't been for the way that John was going about cracking the egg.

Cortana winced as he whacked the egg on the side of the bowl. "You might want—"

It exploded in his hand.

"—to be careful," she unnecessarily finished. She took the eggshell from his hand and threw it in the refuse bin across the room, grateful that something had distracted her.

He took a spare rag from the counter and wiped off his hand.

"John." She reached out and stilled his hand. He stiffened under her touch.

His dream must have been more troubling than she had thought. Guilt swirled in her mind. While she was turning into a pile of hormones by her close proximity to him, he was unsettled by it. She took the rag from his hand and set it on the counter. "We don't have to do this, you know. If your nightmare—"

He clenched his jaw. "I didn't have a nightmare." His gaze shifted away from her guiltily.

Oh.

Oh.

Suddenly everything -the looks, the tension, the touches- made sense to Cortana.

For all of her assurance that she and John would ultimately end up

together romantically -who else would there be?- she found herself uncharacteristically flustered at this realization.

He was supposed to be the one who was aloof when it came to their physical attraction; she was the one who was going to have to encourage him to take the next step in their relationship.

His subconscious, it had seemed, beat her to it.

She raised an eyebrow. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Her playful question released the mounting tension in the room. A ghost of a grin passed over his lips as he looked back at her.

"No."

Cortana smiled at his expected answer. "Get back to bed," she ordered gently. "I'll clean up down here."

"I'm sorry I woke you," he said sincerely.

She wasn't. He had kept his promise, despite his awkwardness. "Don't be. I'll see you at the debriefing in a few hours."

He looked at her for a second before nodding. "Thanks." Whether he was thanking her for not holding the late-night call against him or letting him escape before the sexual tension bubbled over and they did something they weren't prepared for, she didn't know.

Just when it seemed like he was ready to walk away, he took a step closer towards her. "There's only you, Cortana." A self-deprecating smile passed over his lips. "Even if it takes us awhile to get there."

Her stomach flipped over itself. There was a promise in his statement.

She stood on her tiptoes and John leaned down to meet her. She pressed her lips against his as her eyes fluttered closed. Her lips parted slightly as John's hands -warm and strong- moved to her hips. His thumbs rubbed tiny circles over her; Cortana's arms moved from her sides to wrap around John's neck, pulling him closer.

"Cortana," he rumbled.

A girl could get used to this, she thought dazedly.

She wasn't sure how much time had passed before John pulled away, lips swollen and eyes dilated. Her left arm dropped to her side as she wiped off her lips with her right thumb.

Even though she suspected that neither of them would be able to fall back asleep, she knew it would be best for him to leave. She doubted he had even intended for her to kiss him. She raised an eyebrow.

"Weren't you going to go back to your quarters?"

He gave her a slow nod. "I'll see you at the debriefing."

"Wouldn't miss it." She watched as he turned around, not before giving her a onceover that caused her to blush, and walk away. Just as he was reaching the doorway, she called, "And John?" He paused and

faced her. "Have sweet dreams."

"I don't think that's going to be a problem."

It could have been the lighting, or the fact that she was operating on three hours of sleep, but she swore she saw him wink before walking away.

Sweet dreams indeed, she thought with a smirk.

End
file.